

Introduction

This past year, local officials from the City of Monroe, Frenchtown Charter Township and Monroe Charter Township agreed to work together on a new cooperative planning and community development process. Known as **Resilient Monroe**, this unique planning effort is designed to strengthen the community's ability to better manage the changes and challenges associated with future economic variability and climate change.

Ultimately, the Resilient Monroe project is all about helping leaders and citizens of the greater Monroe Community refine their land use and development plans. Therefore, serious effort will be made to support the City of Monroe in rewriting its existing Master Plan and to assist the participating townships in reviewing their Master Plans. It is through this context that a planning *charrette* was conducted for the Telegraph Corridor (see inset at right).

Telegraph Road

Present-day Telegraph Road has served as a prominent corridor for transportation and infrastructure for hundreds of years. The Sauk Native American Tribe used portions of the route for trading on what is now known as the Saginaw Trail. In the late 1800s, telegraph lines were placed along this corridor, giving the modern roadway its namesake. The first roadway through the corridor was constructed just after 1900.

Today, Telegraph Road is one of the primary north-south corridors in the Monroe Community, connecting all three jurisdictions. Approximately 29,000 vehicles use the corridor each day. The Telegraph Corridor is dominated by the automobile. Sidewalk infrastructure is inconsistent, disjointed and even absent in many areas. Adjacent land use is primarily commercial, featuring many small “strip-mall” type developments and expansive parking lots. Despite the commercial success of some areas along the corridor, there are a number of vacancies. The architecture and condition of buildings along portions of the corridor is very inconsistent and appears outdated and unmaintained in certain areas. The charrette focused on a seven-mile portion of Telegraph Road, roughly between Dunbar Road to the south and Stewart Road to the north.

What is a Charrette?

A charrette is a multi-day collaborative planning event that engages community members to create and support a feasible plan for sustainable and positive change for a specific issue or area of the community.



1848 Telegraph Map

- Chas. B. Barr

Charrette Preparation

Prior to the charrette, project team members worked to aggregate and analyze information and data to help inform the planning process. Information gathered included traffic volumes and daily traffic counts, accident data, right-of-way distances, sidewalk infrastructure, impervious surfaces and canopy cover, vacancy counts, existing zoning regulations, and current land use.

To ensure stakeholder and public participation, posters were placed throughout the community, press releases were submitted and run in the Monroe Evening News, and personal invitations were sent out by local officials and municipal staff members. In addition, postcards were mailed to every business and household along the corridor.

Charrette Process and Activities

Day One

On the first day of the charrette, project team members conducted a final walk-through and visual audit of specific areas and elements along the corridor. The purpose of this walk-through and audit was to solidify the context and constraints of the study area and test preliminary design concepts. A preliminary walk-through and audit of these same areas was conducted in previous months leading up to the charrette.

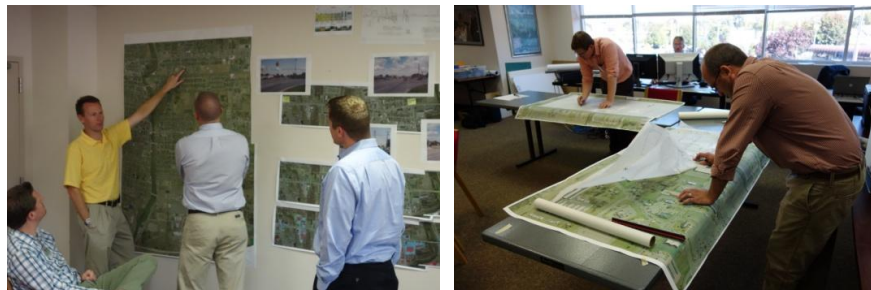
In addition to the visual audit, charrette team members facilitated a series of meetings with different community stakeholder groups. The purpose of these meetings was to get a clear (and firsthand) understanding of the key issues, constraints and visions of the corridor. Based on the feedback received, the charrette team began to generate preliminary design concepts and alternatives.



The modern Telegraph Corridor is dominated by the automobile, with little to no pedestrian infrastructure.

Charrette - Day One.

Charrette team members facilitated a series of stakeholder meetings and began to develop preliminary design concepts.



Later that first evening, the charrette team hosted a public workshop on the corridor. The workshop provided an opportunity for citizens to learn about the charrette process, as well as the basic principles and best practices of placemaking, urban form, and retail redevelopment. Following a brief presentation, participants were asked to complete a series of brainstorming activities. Working in small groups of eight to 10 people, participants were asked to identify, map and illustrate:

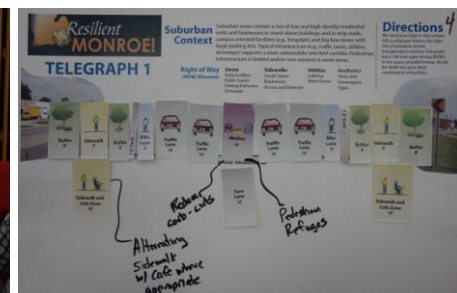
- Five positive aspects of the corridor;
- Five negative aspects of the corridor;
- Three new businesses they would like to see along the corridor;
- A vision for the corridor; and
- A vision for the roadway.

At the conclusion of the first day, several themes began to emerge. These themes would become the primary focus of the charrette.

- A. Establish an Identity and Sense of Place along the Corridor.
- B. Redevelop the Telegraph Road La-Z-Boy Site.
- C. Develop Mill Run Park.
- D. Redevelop Stone Street and the Telegraph/Custer Road/Front Street Community Gateway.

Charrette - Day One.

Charrette team members facilitated a public workshop where participants were asked to describe their vision for the corridor.



Charrette - Day Two

On the second day of the charrette, team members continued to facilitate meetings with various community stakeholder groups. The purpose of these meetings was to review and solicit comments and suggestions on the draft concepts and design sketches developed by the charrette team the previous day. Based on these additional comments and suggestions, the charrette team continued to refine concepts, explore design alternatives, develop new sketches, and formalize recommendations.

Charrette - Day Two.

Charrette team members continue to discuss and analyze design alternatives with community stakeholders throughout the day.



Later that second evening, a comprehensive set of concepts, ideas, and sketches were presented at a public open house. The open house gave stakeholders and interested citizens an opportunity to provide additional comments and suggestions.

Charrette - Day Two.

A comprehensive set of concepts and design alternatives were presented at a public open house, providing an opportunity for citizens to make more comments and suggestions.



Charrette - Day Three

Based on the suggestions and comments received at the open house and on additional feedback throughout the third day, the charrette team began to refine and develop the final set of concepts, sketches and recommendations for the community. The final concepts, sketches and recommendations were presented to the community at a final public meeting in the City of Monroe Council Chambers.

Charrette - Day Three.

Based on feedback from the previous day, the charrette team continued to refine the design concepts and recommendations. These were then presented to the community at a final public meeting later in the evening.



Charrette Findings and Recommendations

The following pages provide an overview of the results and recommendations of the charrette. It should be noted that many of these concepts and ideas are just that — concepts and ideas. While some of these concepts have been vetted through preliminary analysis and expert verification, additional study and analysis will be required. These efforts will require cooperation with local, regional and state agencies (e.g., Michigan Department of Transportation).

Identity and Sense of Place

The Monroe Community has a number of unique assets that help establish identity and sense of place. The River Raisin, Lake Erie, the Port of Monroe, and the little inlets and harbors that dot the Lake Erie coastline contribute to the community's coastal and freshwater identity. The River Raisin National Battlefield Park, the statue of General Custer, and numerous historic districts and neighborhoods

contribute to the community's historic identity. Historic buildings, walkable retail establishments, active restaurants and civic celebrations make downtown Monroe one of the most visited and recognizable areas in the region.

Right now, the Telegraph Corridor has no unique character. In many ways, it looks like the average suburban corridor that you would expect to find in any community. The charrette team believes that in order to attract new businesses and reinvestment along the corridor, a unique identity and sense of place needs to be established. Due to the fact that Telegraph Road runs through each jurisdiction and functions as a gateway into the greater Monroe Community, the charrette team also believes that the corridor has the potential to become an important part of the identity of the entire community.

Recommendation

We recommend using placemaking strategies, including landscaping and streetscaping, to transform the character of the Telegraph Corridor.

Street Trees and Vegetative Buffers

One of the biggest complaints mentioned during the charrette process was the lack of trees along the corridor. Trees provide protection from extreme heat and have a natural cooling effect on their immediate surroundings. Trees also reduce the scale of the street, humanize large and tall buildings, make environments more pedestrian friendly, and improve the overall aesthetics of shopping areas. Street trees may also benefit economic activity, as trees have been shown to positively affect the mood of shoppers.

Vegetation and landscaping, when designed properly, can also provide significant stormwater storage. The frequency and intensity of heavy rain storms is projected to increase. To mitigate damage from intense storms, the Monroe Community should take a hard look at stormwater storage capacity during times of peak runoff. Bioswales and rain gardens can offer on-site water storage. Vegetative buffers also increase the desirability of public and semi-public spaces.

Recommendation

We recommend that street trees be planted along the public right-of-way continuously on both sides of Telegraph Road. Wherever possible, we also recommend that street trees be planted on private property between the parking lot and the sidewalk. Because of stormwater management potential, we

recommend that bioswales and vegetative buffers be located around the entire perimeter of new parking lots, and that islands are added within parking lots to increase on-site water storage capacity.

Streetscaping

Streetscaping can be very effective as a placemaking strategy to reduce traffic speeds and improve the overall appeal of the public right-of-way. In the first set of pictures below (A), current traffic signals and lighting are replaced with more aesthetically pleasing infrastructure, including additional trees planted in the public right-of-way. Although it seems simple, these investments could greatly improve the overall user experience regardless of transportation mode.

Picture A. Current View



Picture A. Proposed View



The next set of pictures (B) illustrates an updated version of the corridor when a median is added, trees are planted, and streetlights follow a more uniform and consistent design. A median could reduce traffic speeds and provide a safe haven for pedestrians who are crossing the road. In addition, vegetation within the median could absorb stormwater runoff.

Picture B. Current View



Picture B. Proposed View



Access Management

Another way to improve the character and overall function of Telegraph is through *access management* (see inset at right). In 2005, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) hired a private firm to analyze traffic safety, traffic operations, and access management of Telegraph Road. The final report identified areas of ingress and egress that could be reduced or removed to improve traffic flow and safety. A total of 100 access management proposals were developed by MDOT. The City of Monroe still considers the report relevant for informing transportation investments. Unfortunately, combining driveways is a slow process, often taking years to finalize agreements among multiple property owners.

Recommendation

We recommend prioritizing access management strategies on the northern portion of Telegraph near Stewart Road, since this area has the highest Average Daily Traffic counts and averages the most accidents per year. As new construction and redevelopment site plans are reviewed, the city and both townships should work to ensure that the total number of driveways is not increased, and that driveways are eliminated or moved to adjacent streets whenever possible.

What is Access Management?

Access management is a set of proven techniques that can help reduce traffic congestion, preserve the flow of traffic, improve traffic safety, prevent crashes, preserve existing road capacity, and preserve investment in roads by managing the location, design and type of access to property.

- The Access Management Guidebook
MDOT, 2001

Walkability and Pedestrian Access

Charrette participants placed a high importance on the ability to walk to and along the corridor. During the first public workshop, each workgroup included sidewalks in their “vision” for the public right-of-way along the corridor. Some groups even included bike lanes in their vision.

One concern that is often noted by local township officials is that any inconsistency in the sidewalk infrastructure, specifically where there might be two or more inches of vertical rise, could be considered in “disrepair” and therefore the municipality could be considered liable in the case of an accident or injury. This has been a significant obstacle in the willingness of the townships to develop sidewalk infrastructure.

Recommendation

There are portions of Telegraph Road that already have adequate sidewalk infrastructure, with a sufficient buffer between pedestrian and vehicular traffic. We recommend that sidewalk infrastructure be extended so it is continuous on both sides of Telegraph Road. Although sidewalks are not required for new developments in the townships, sidewalks greatly increase pedestrian safety and also improve the user experience. In some instances where there is not sufficient right-of-way to build a sidewalk between the road and the private parcel, we recommend working with the property owners to purchase an easement so the municipality can build sidewalks. Ideally, there would be a connected grid of sidewalks leading to residential developments along side streets that intersect with Telegraph. If sidewalks are not feasible along the more rural portions of the corridor, the townships may want to consider a bike pathway (see C below). In addition, pedestrian crosswalks should be incorporated into future road improvements at signaled intersections.

Walkability - Charrette participants placed a high importance on being able to walk along the corridor. There are several areas along the corridor where people are obviously walking despite the lack of sidewalk infrastructure.



Picture C. Current View



Picture C. Proposed View



Parking

There are approximately 181 acres along the Telegraph study area dedicated to parking. In general, parking lot design follows the typical suburban “strip” commercial development pattern. Most businesses provide parking in front, and with the exception of peak shopping times, the majority of the parking lots are less than half full.

Recommendation

We recommend that each municipality considers reducing the minimum parking requirements. The zoning ordinances could be amended to deter businesses from building expansive parking in front. Currently the City of Monroe zoning code (265-20) states: “No more than seventy-five (75) percent of the off-street parking area devoted to the large scale retail establishment may be located between the front facade of the principal building and the abutting streets.” Ideally, the percentage would be lower than 75 percent.

A great way to reduce the number of parking spaces but still meet the peak parking demand is by encouraging businesses with different patron schedules to share parking spaces. For example, a church and a restaurant that are adjacent to one another could share a parking lot (see example at right). Another strategy to reduce the total impervious surface area and ease runoff during heavy rain events is to

Shared Parking - Shared parking (with internal connections) is a great way to reduce the number of parking spaces and minimize vehicular conflicts.



consider pervious pavement. As pictured at right, pervious pavement is a great alternative to traditional pavement, and can reduce flooding and potential damage to buildings from heavy rain events.

Signs

There are a number of signs along the corridor that do not conform to existing zoning regulations. Currently, the municipalities allow ground signs, wall signs, and banner signs of a certain size. Animated flashing or moving signs as well as rooftop signs are not allowed. According to Robert Gibbs in *Principles of Urban Retail Planning and Development*, signs should be well-designed, properly scaled, and support continuity but encourage individuality.

Buildings

The mass, height, façade and architectural features of buildings and blocks along Telegraph are fairly inconsistent. The charrette team recommends that the three jurisdictions work together to establish building design guidelines. When considering such guidelines, local officials should consider elements of form, including: height, mass, orientation, architecture, roof-lines and building materials. In addition, design guidelines may want to incorporate elements of form that contribute to retail success, as cited by Robert Gibbs in *Principles of Urban Retail Planning and Development*.

Awnings define the first-level storefront, reinforce the brand, and bring attention to the business.

Best Practices for Awnings:

1. Awning materials should be constructed from canvas, cloth, steel or glass, but should reflect the overall character of the business brand; awnings constructed of plastic and internally illuminated should not be permitted.
2. Color should be limited to two colors.
3. Lettering should be limited to 8 inches in height and only allowed on the front flap rather than on the top-sloped awning.
4. Awnings should complement the character of the building and should not cover architectural elements.
5. Awnings should be no more than 6 to 8 feet deep and have a pitch no more than 25 degrees.

Pervious Pavement - Pervious pavement can reduce stormwater runoff and flooding.



Photo by E-Landscape Specialty Solutions

Buildings - Local officials should consider establishing design guidelines for buildings along the corridor.



Windows and Doors help advertise goods, reinforce building form, and add interest to pedestrians.

Best Practices for Windows and Doors:

1. At least 60% of first-level storefronts facing the primary sidewalk should be transparent glass.
2. Keep displays simple, don't overcrowd.
3. Keep the back of the display window open to allow the store's interior to be visible.
4. Primary doors should face the sidewalk.
5. Doors facing the street should be recessed whenever practical.

Connectivity

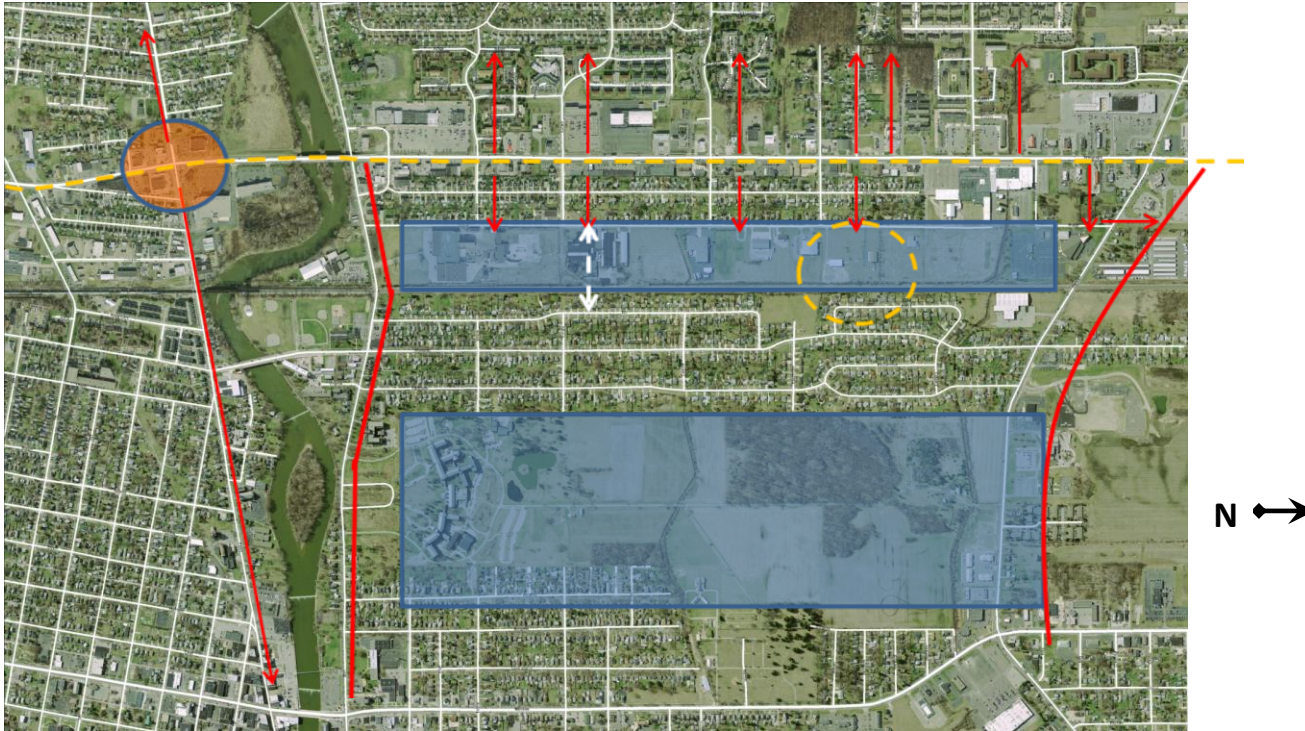
Connectivity through Monroe — especially east-west connectivity — is an issue that has been repeatedly identified during previous public planning exercises. Concern over the lack of connectivity was also identified during the charrette. The biggest obstacles are the large band of industrial parcels just east of Telegraph, a series of railroads, and the IHM property.

Recommendation

We recommend that local officials from the City of Monroe and Frenchtown Charter Township consider the feasibility of street or pathway connections through these critical areas. Special consideration should be given to a possible connection on Lorain Street as well as Hendricks Street, near the city-owned parcel. The railroad right-of-way presents a significant challenge to connectivity because it runs parallel to Telegraph.

Connectivity - Local officials should explore the feasibility of a street or pathway connection at certain locations just east of Telegraph, such as the public parcel located off of Hendricks Street.





Mill Race Park - River Access

Mill Race Park is an underutilized public space that has the potential to serve as an access point to the River Raisin. Charrette participants were enthusiastic about the potential redevelopment of Mill Race Park to include amenities such as an ADA accessible kayak and canoe launch, a picnic area pavilion, a boardwalk system, and viewing platforms. Participants also suggested making the park a learning laboratory.

Mill Race Park - Mill Race Park could be redeveloped into a public access site to the River Raisin.





Telegraph Road & Stone Street

Just south of the intersection of Telegraph and Custer Road/Front Street, there is a densely populated cluster of shops and buildings. On the west side of the block there are several retail establishments. On the east side of the block there are several buildings that sit empty and in disrepair. Several of these buildings are located close to the road and retain some unique architectural quality. However, an adjacent mechanic shop has placed its parts lot next to the building. This lot directly impacts the potential redevelopment of this site. Furthermore, local officials believe it has also negatively impacted the character of housing on Stone Street.

Telegraph & Stone Street - A densely populated cluster of buildings and retail shops sits empty and in disrepair.



Due to its proximity to Custer, which is the gateway to the community, and the planned redevelopment of the Farmer Jacks site across the street by the hospital, the charrette team believes this is an ideal area for redevelopment. Redevelopment should include a mix of uses, with an emphasis on first-floor retail. Sidewalks should be widened and realigned to create safe pedestrian access to the block. The graphical rendering below (Proposed View D) depicts what the parcel could look like, including a coffee shop and an outdoor public space for gathering.

Picture D. Current View



Picture D. Proposed View



La-Z-Boy Site

La-Z-Boy plays an important role in the Monroe Community. After 80 years, the furniture giant will be moving its world headquarters from its current location along Telegraph Road to a new site about a mile to the east. The Telegraph site sits on about 29 acres, with direct frontage on Telegraph Road. The charrette team believes this is an ideal site for redevelopment — the type of redevelopment that could drastically change the future viability of the entire corridor.

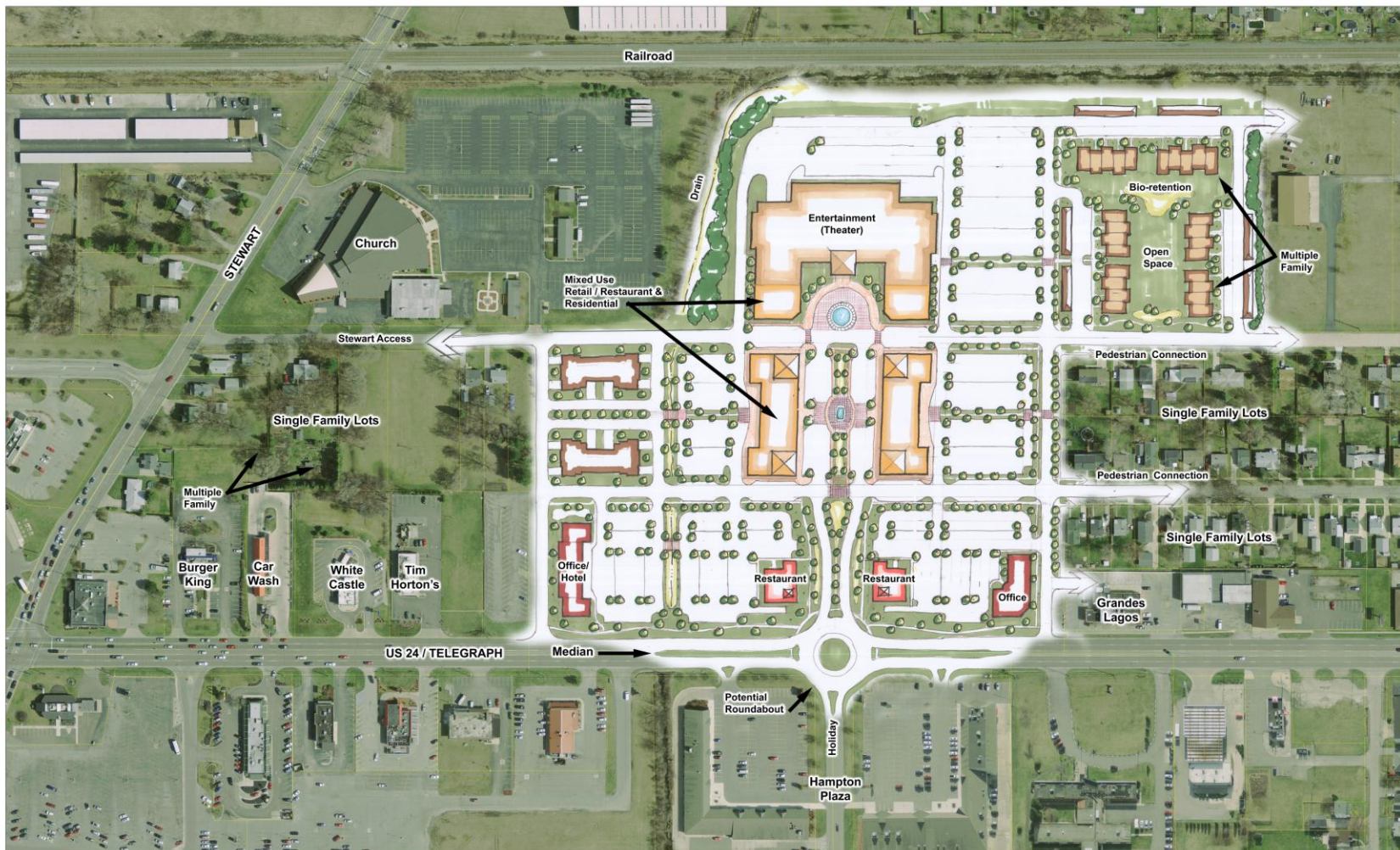
The site would be the ideal location for a “lifestyle center” redevelopment, a mixed-use development project centered on entertainment and small retail/restaurant establishments. The primary anchor would be a new movie theater and/or a bookstore. Other establishments would include a mix of local and national retail shops and restaurants. The site would also accommodate a mixture of condos, townhouses

La-Z -Boy Site



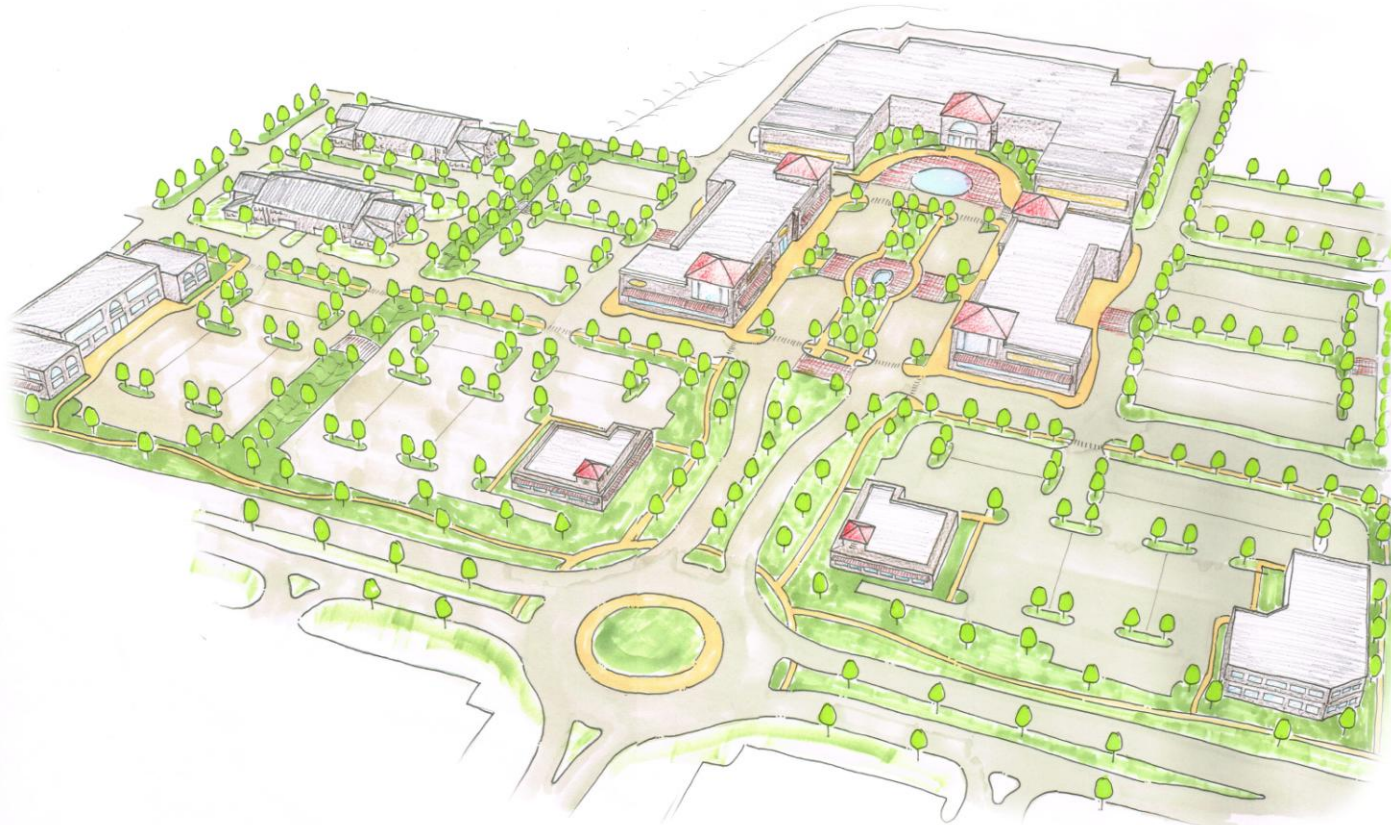
and lofts. Dillin Corp owner Larry Dillin, who provided professional consultation during the charrette, believes the site would attract about a \$50 million investment. The redevelopment would be pedestrian oriented with large public areas (for special events), sidewalk cafes and outdoor eating spaces.

La-Z-Boy Redevelopment Concept - Phase I.

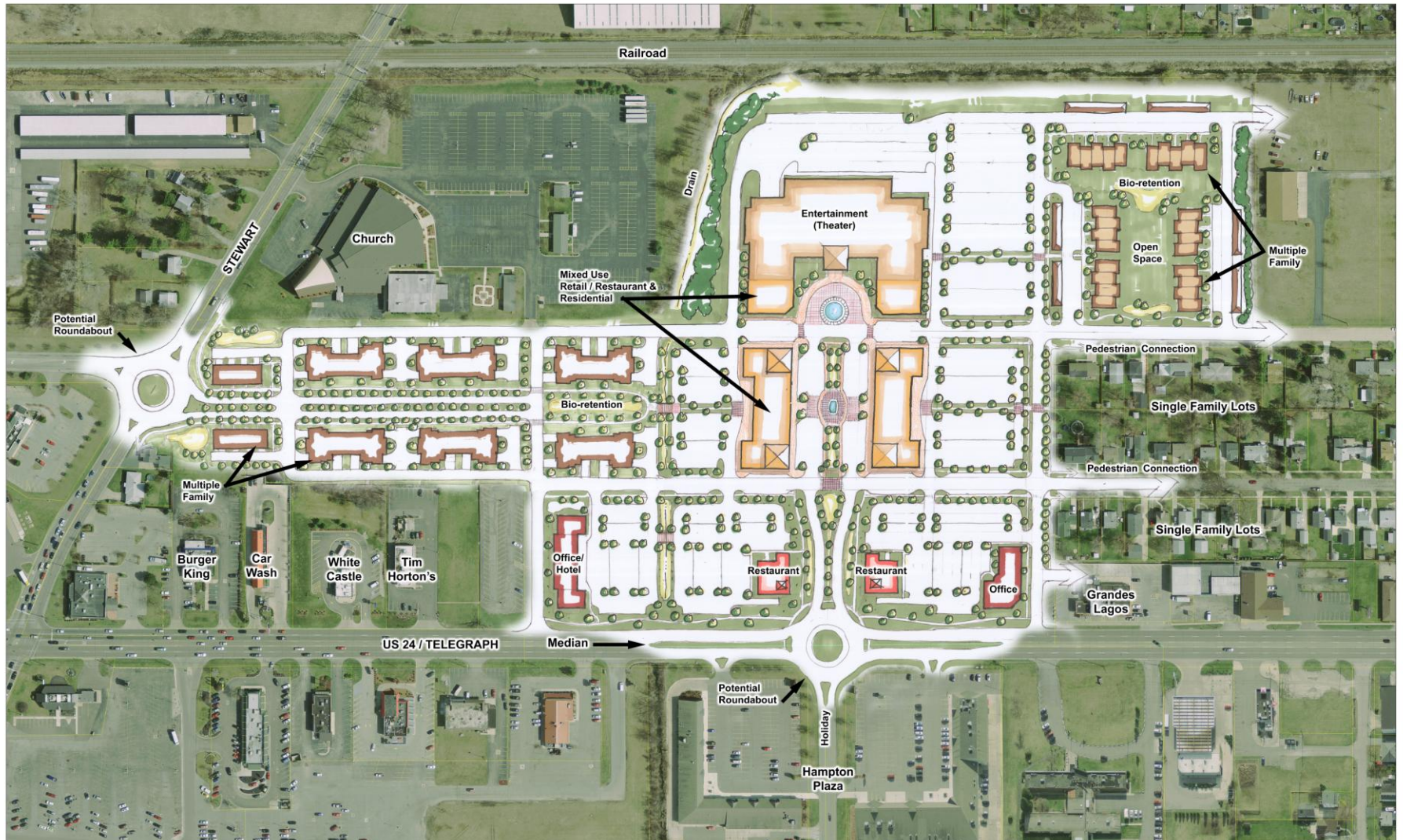


The charrette team believes a well-designed roundabout would provide the primary entryway into the site. Located directly on Telegraph, the roundabout would provide a focal point for traffic on Telegraph and within the new development. Furthermore, roundabouts have proven to increase traffic efficiency and decrease vehicle/pedestrian conflicts. Other features may include additional access to Stewart Street from the east side of the redevelopment. One of the first things the City of Monroe and Frenchtown Charter Township should consider is amending their zoning ordinances to accommodate such a development. This may include an overlay zone or a special form-based code zoning district. The following pages illustrate what the new redevelopment could look like. Phase II incorporates additional housing and the connection to Stewart.

La-Z-Boy Redevelopment Concept - Phase I.



La-Z-Boy Redevelopment Concept - Phase II.



Additional Retail Opportunities

A redevelopment project like the one proposed above has the potential to catalyze additional development and investment along the Telegraph Corridor and beyond. Other investments in the larger Monroe Community also have the potential to catalyze additional investments on the Telegraph Corridor.

For example, the recently unveiled Heritage Corridor-East Master Plan for the River Raisin National Battlefield Park is an investment that could bring millions of additional dollars into the local economy. Assuming a full buildout of the National Battlefield Park Master Plan, there will be a predicted \$21.9 million increase to sales in the local economy. Because Telegraph is an essential retail corridor for the community, new retail opportunities will likely be focused on Telegraph, especially if Telegraph is well-connected with downtown and to the National Battlefield Park.

Marketplace profile information from ESRI Business Analyst software and Dunn and Bradstreet indicates there are a number of unmet retail opportunities in the Monroe Community. The data indicates “leakages” in spending power that is leaving the Monroe Community. If these retail options were offered in Monroe, more dollars would remain in the Monroe Community. Examples of these leakages include specialty food stores, shoe stores, jewelry, luggage and leather goods, special food services, and drinking establishments. As illustrated in the photographs at right, there are many opportunities to redevelop vacant parcels and underdeveloped parcels. As more public and private investment is made along Telegraph Road, underutilized parking lots will be converted into higher value uses.

Implementation - Tools & Practices

Design Guidelines

In an effort to improve the visual appearance of the built environment along Telegraph Road, the planning commission from each jurisdiction should work with property owners along the corridor to establish a comprehensive set of design guidelines. In general, the design guidelines should establish standards that support a more walkable and pedestrian-oriented corridor. The guidelines should address overall site design (parking, building location, mechanical infrastructure and access), landscaping, building form and orientation (bulk, entrances and façades), and signage. In addition, the guidelines should integrate components of sustainability in landscaping and building façades, such as solar panels

Additional Retail Opportunities - The redevelopment of the La-Z-Boy site into a “lifestyle center” has the potential to be a catalyst for other redevelopment projects along the entire Telegraph Corridor.



Design Guidelines - Design guidelines work to convey a sense of the preferred vision for an area. It is important to note that design guidelines are not regulatory. Rather, design guidelines provide a connection between general planning principles and the zoning ordinance.

and green roofs. Collaborating with local property owners is important, as they can be one of the biggest advocates of change. It is important to understand that design guidelines are not regulatory documents, they are simply guidelines. However, design guidelines help to establish the foundation for any future zoning changes that might address these components. In developing design guidelines, the planning commissions should consult the *Principles of Urban Retail Planning and Development* by Robert Gibbs.

Zoning

Once design guidelines are established, each planning commission should consider amending its zoning ordinance to align with and support the design and sustainability standards outlined in the design guideline document. Amendments may be in the form of an overlay zoning district or an entirely new zoning district. Zoning amendments that allow for a mix of uses will be required prior to the redevelopment of the La-Z-Boy site. In addition, zoning amendments should address parking, landscape, building form and signage standards.

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

The Transportation Alternatives Program was authorized under Section 1122 of the Federal *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act* (MAP-21). Under the Program, each state Department of Transportation is required to allocate 2 percent of its total Federal Highway funds for programs and projects defined as *transportation alternatives*. Examples of transportation alternatives include non-motorized trails, sidewalks, transit stops or stations, and education and safety programs such as Safe Routes to School. This is a potential funding source for many corridor improvements.

Brownfield Redevelopment Funding

Redevelopment activities for the La-Z-Boy site may be eligible for Brownfield Redevelopment funding. The Brownfield Redevelopment Authority should continue to explore Brownfield funding options, which may include Michigan Business Tax Credits and Tax Increment Financing.

Access Management

In 2005, the Michigan Department of Transportation worked with the *Corradino Group* to develop a comprehensive Access Management Plan for Telegraph Road. Several of the recommendations and proposed improvements have been implemented. During the charrette, the City of Monroe Engineering Department noted that many of the remaining recommendations are still applicable. Therefore, the charrette team suggests that the city continue to pursue funding to incorporate access management improvements along the corridor.

Brownfield Redevelopment Funds - The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) offers grants and loans for environmental assessments and cleanups at properties with known or suspected environmental contamination. Funds are targeted to projects that promote economic development and the reuse of brownfield properties.

Natural Resource Funding Sources

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) provides funding assistance for state and local outdoor recreation needs, including land acquisition and development of recreation facilities. This assistance is directed at creating and improving outdoor recreational opportunities and providing protection to valuable natural resources. Grant amounts range from \$15,000 to \$500,000, with a required minimum local match of 25 percent. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provides grants to local units of government to acquire and develop land for outdoor recreation. At least 50 percent match on either acquisition or development projects is required from LWCF applicants. The City of Monroe should pursue these funding sources in support of efforts to redevelop Mill Race Park.

Corridor Improvement Authority

A Corridor Improvement Authority functions in a similar way to that of a Downtown Development Authority (DDA). Partnering together in an Authority would allow the three jurisdictions to jointly oversee a more concerted effort to plan for, fund and implement mutually beneficial public infrastructure projects and the redevelopment and revitalization of underperforming commercial properties. A Joint Corridor Improvement Authority would be overseen by a board made up of residents, business owners and public officials from each of the three jurisdictions. The Corridor Improvement Authority Act also allows such inter-governmental bodies to utilize Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to fund and maintain public infrastructure projects.